

Festival scene is booming

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When the Arctic High hits Alberta and nights are longer than days, most artists cocoon indoors. Spring seems so far away.

But it's June and in these parts that means festival season is about to burst through the gate. The chill of coats and boots is giving way to flip flops, shorts and folding chairs.

In the last 30 years Edmonton has blossomed as the centre, the heartbeat of the province's arts and cultural scene. This coming weekend, four festivals shift into high gear – NextFest, Creative Age Festival, Open Sky Music Festival and Edmonton Pride Festival.

And if the temperatures play along, organizers expect the four combined festivals to draw a turnout in excess of 75,000 visitors.

Each festival represents a special facet of what makes the greater Edmonton area so unique. Music is always a big draw, but there's everything from theatre, comedy, improv, art exhibits, a film fest, cabaret nights, a parade and diva nights.

And don't forget the vibrant restaurant scene with its fusion of world cuisine. Yes, Edmonton is percolating with talent so get out there and join the fun.

Creative Age Festival

June 8 to 10

Timms Centre for the Arts

87 Ave. and 112 St.

Tickets: \$10. Call 780-420-1757 or go online to: www.tixonthesquare.ca

The Creative Age Festival gives a voice to silver-haired artists. Too often anyone 55 plus is relegated to the back stage of life, but this three-day fest gives seniors a platform to express their identity, concerns and aspirations. And it's all done through drama, music, visual arts and dance.

No one is more passionate about the festival than artistic director David Barnet, a drama professor from the University of Alberta, who jumped on board to helm the project six years ago.

"I think it's become well-known that anyone involved in the arts finds benefits to their health and it's proven to be socially engaging and it's an enormous amount of fun. I believe all seniors can participate in the arts and what this festival does is advocate for that. What comes out of it is a joyfulness, a playfulness, a mischievousness.

Organizers have slotted three fun workshops – acting, rock and roll, and comedy improv. The heavy hitters take to the stage on Friday night with A Bit of This and A Bit of That Variety Show showcasing choirs, magicians, storytellers, poets and writers.

On Saturday night Barnet has slotted Plays, Plays and More Plays spotlighting a variety of seniors' troupes such as Rural Route Actors Troupe and the Rapid Fire Geri-Improv Troupe. Barnet's own Geri-Actors are showcasing three new plays, each about 10 minutes in length, with St. Albert's John Grootelar stepping into the limelight.

Closing the event is Timms' Art Café on Sunday afternoon with an eclectic lineup of belly dancing, stand-up comedy, storytelling, short scenes and singing.

"It's very much like a kitchen party – low profile, easy going, convivial and low stress."

For a complete festival program check out www.cafestival.ca.